

Health & Safety Tip #65

Seafood & Shellfish Safety

A diet rich in seafood:

- reduces the risk of heart disease,
- lowers blood triglycerides (fats),
- contributes to lower blood pressure, and
- may improve symptoms of inflammatory diseases, arthritis and psoriasis.

To ensure your seafood is safe to eat, follow these simple safety tips:

- **Purchase seafood products from approved sources/vendors only.**
- **Do not harvest shellfish from areas closed by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.**
- **Refrigerate raw fish at or below 4°C (40°F) as soon as possible.**
- **Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding should avoid consuming raw fish to decrease the chances of food borne illness, which can be harmful to both mother and child.**
- **Prepare seafood properly before eating:**
 - ~ Ingestion of raw or inadequately cooked seafood, or the ingestion of any food cross-contaminated by the handling raw seafood, is the usual mode of transmission of organisms that cause food poisoning (vibrio parahaemolyticus and vibrio vulnificus). These organisms are found in fish and shellfish during the warm season, and in marine silt in the cold season.
 - ~ Symptoms can occur within 4 - 30 hours after eating contaminated seafood and include abdominal cramps - often with nausea, fever and headache. Severity can be moderate to severe and last one to seven days.
 - ~ Cooking destroys many of the organisms that may cause food-borne illness associated with shellfish.
- **Limit mercury exposure:**
 - ~ Predatory fish such as shark, swordfish, and tuna (not canned) have higher levels of mercury and should only be eaten occasionally (no more than once a week).
 - ~ Pregnant women, women of child-bearing age and young children should limit their intake of these fish to no more than one meal a month.
- **Do not eat or harvest bivalve shellfish (such as oysters, mussels, clams, geoducks and scallops) from | areas closed due to Red Tide.**
 - ~ Red Tides are the result of elevated algae blooms in the ocean that can occur when water temperatures rise. The algae cause a high level of histamine in bivalve shellfish, which is responsible for Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP) . Adequate cooking will not destroy the PSP toxin, and ingestion can cause severe illness, paralysis or even death.

Resources:

Fisheries & Oceans (250) 363 3252, or www-comm.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/pages/mediacentre/default_e.htm

BC Centre for Disease Control, Fish Safety Specialist (604) 775-0763 or visit: www.bccdc.ca/foodhealth/fish/default.htm

